

Climate change conference in Bali

Bangladesh must make its points in forceful manner

THE conference on Climate Change beginning in Bali today is an opportunity for countries recently affected by natural disasters to take stock of their losses. More importantly, the conference offers a forum for such countries to draw attention to the causes behind the tragedies they have of late gone through. Obviously, there is much truth in the statement that the scale of suffering wrought by nature has been a direct consequence of the rather unprecedented changes that have come over climate patterns owing to global warming. For Bangladesh, the position is clear: it cannot but express its strong support for such initiatives as the one about to get underway in Bali.

It goes without saying that Bangladesh, where the matter is one of disasters caused by a change in climatic behaviour, has been at the receiving end without in any way having contributed to such change. It is a point that the Bangladesh delegation will need to emphasise strongly at Bali, given especially the fact that Cyclone Sidr, which has caused such immense damage in terms of loss of lives and nature in the south of the country, is largely seen not as a normal happening but a direct offshoot of climate change. It is here that the issue of gas emissions by developed countries takes centre stage once again. With the inter-governmental panel on climate change already singling out countries like Bangladesh and the Maldives as spots likely to be the worst affected by global warming, it becomes imperative for the international community to go back to initiatives like the Kyoto Protocol and come up with answers to the many questions that are being raised. The recent floods and cyclone in Bangladesh have already drawn attention to the devastation that may yet be caused in future, and not just in Bangladesh, if serious, purposeful efforts are not made to tackle global warming issues.

The urgent need is for a technology-based, efficient system to deal with natural disasters to be put in place. In this context, we believe that the setting up of a strongly funded international adaptation centre, here in Bangladesh, for undertaking research on the effects of climate change as well as suggesting measures toward preparedness in the face of oncoming disasters will reflect a seriousness of approach to the issue on the part of the global community.

Let the Bali conference offer points of light to a world beginning to feel the ramifications of global warming.

Backup of optical fibre line

Put it in place without delay

THAT we do not yet have a back-up of the optical fibre line in place indicates that this has not been accorded the priority that it deserves. One would have expected that the relevant authorities might have addressed the matter, which has to do with the country's only internet and telephone connectivity with the outside world, with more urgency than we have noticed so far.

As it is, there have been 22 instances of disruption in the line of which seven times were the result of miscreants' act. This might well have been acts of sabotage to cut the country off from the outside world. Given this vulnerability, and the law enforcement agencies' inability to apprehend the gang responsible for the acts so far, the alternative should have been operationalised by now. One of the reasons for it perhaps is that the BTTB has not been able to make up its mind as to which option to finally go for.

As we understand from a report on BTTB's fix regarding setting up of the backup measure appearing in this newspaper, the telephone authorities are as yet undecided whether to take up the offer of the Power Grid Company, a government owned company (PGCB), that would cost something in the region of US\$ 2.7 million or that of Bangla Phone (BP) where swapping of the fibre optic line whenever needed would come free of cost.

The matter brooks no delay. If there is any compelling reason that prevents the BTTB from taking up the free offer, given that we lose almost US\$ 70,000 for every hour that the optical fibre line remains disrupted, a cost benefit analysis of the offer for a 5-year period by the PGCB, that too a government-owned company, makes for a good deal.

Reportedly, the government may perhaps be contemplating to declare it as a Key Point Installation (KPI). But given that the submarine cable stretches over almost 400 kilometers, providing constant watch over it may prove somewhat difficult. Thus there is also the need for the government to come up with a viable option, apart from a back-up, to reduce the vulnerability of the fibre optic line to sabotage.

Continuing political drama in Pakistan



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

GOING DEEPER

In the ultimate analysis, all South Asian nations should endeavour for the establishment of electoral democracy in case liberal democracy cannot return to Pakistan due to ethnic and sectarian conflict coupled with the inherent conviction of the military that they would continue to be the guardians of the supreme interest of the Pakistan nation.

GENERAL Pervez Musharraf has finally shed his military uniform and has taken oath of office as a civilian president, though his election was contested in the Supreme Court. Although most of the political prisoners have been released, it is not yet clear if the political crisis prompted by the declaration of emergency has subsided.

In a recent opinion piece in the International Herald Tribune, former EU commissioner Chris Patten, ICG President Gareth Evans and former German foreign minister Joschka Fischer described Musharraf's coup as "against the Constitution, the imposition of martial law by a man who feels more threatened by elections than jihadis groups."

They urged the Western governments "to give up Musharraf policy and adopt a Pakistan policy." The key steps to get the country back on track are for Musharraf to cancel the state of emergency and give up his position as army chief.

Despite US's threat it is difficult to imagine that US assistance to Pakistan would face a substantial cut, because President Bush has made the so-called war on terror his cause célèbre and perhaps his

legacy to the American people; that he saved the US from infamous Osama bin Laden's followers as Roosevelt/Truman saved the Western world against the Nazi menace.

Musharraf's handpicked judges of the Pakistan Supreme Court have thrown out the challenges mounted by the opposition parties to his election as president. Nawaz has called upon Benazir Bhutto to join the boycott of the coming parliamentary and provincial assembly elections.

Benazir's tone is now less strident than it was a few days back. It is possible that backdoor negotiations are going on between Musharraf and Benazir. Any analysis of Pakistani politics would be incomplete without taking into consideration the role to be played by MMA and Muslim League-Qaid-E-Azam (King's Party).

If one looks back to the democratic period, 1988-99, following the death of Ziaul Huq, one would find a Pakistan mired in conflict between the military and the politicians, Islamist parties and secular political institutions.

While the democratic political parties tried to move Pakistan from Islamism to development and

modernity, the military and Islamic forces were busy thwarting this trend by bringing Islam into the foreign policy matrix to strengthen Pakistan's fight over Kashmir and also to promote Pakistan's position in the Islamic world.

During this continuing struggle elections were held in 1993, where Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League won. In the words of political analyst Vali Nasr: "This was for the first time in the Muslim world that the democratic process had produced a brake to Islamism."

Sharif proved that the Islamic vote bank was not the sole property of Jamaat-e-Islami. General Musharraf's emergence in Pakistani politics in 1991 encouraged increasing radicalisation of Islamic discourse, and support to extremist Islamic groups in order to destabilise PML's Islamic constituency and undermine Nawaz Sharif.

Sharif's ouster was followed by the 2002 elections, in which Bhutto's PPP and Sharif's PML were severely disadvantaged. The military naturally regarded both as adversaries and hence looked towards the Islamists -- the MMA coalition of the Deobandi JUI and Jamaat-e-Islami that won 11% of the votes in 2002 elections.

Something that the Islamists had never won in the history of Pakistan.

The party won the majority of the seats in NWFP assembly, and 14 out of 51 in the Beluchistan assembly. According to some, the Deobandi ascendancy in NWFP, Beluchistan and Afghanistan created an Islamist-Panth belt stretching from Kandahar to Quetta to Peshawar.

Does it necessarily mean the ascendancy of the Islamists in Pakistan? Though Pakistan is a deeply religious Islamic country, past elections have shown that the Islamists have not fared well at the polls. Therefore, the Western hope of establishing in most parts of Pakistan a form of secular government may not be ill-founded.

Obstacles to deliberative and liberal democracy remain in the feudal structure of the Pakistani society and the extent of illiteracy in the country, that prevent the general public of knowledge of their rights and privileges written in the Constitution and in various laws.

In this case, ignorance of the general public is bliss for the military rulers, who often regard laws and rules with utter contempt.

A school of thought believes that Pakistan aspires to be the leader of the Muslim world as it is the only member of the OIC to possess nuclear weapons. It is, however, lost on many that possession of nuclear weapons does not necessarily ensure or enhance a country's security.

The US was defeated in the Vietnam War, France had to retreat from Algeria, and the Soviets from Afghanistan. All had nuclear weapons.

These examples may not apply in the charged atmosphere of South Asia, where Indo-Pakistani rivalry is deep rooted in history.

The Saudis, as the guardian of two of the three holiest shrines of the Muslims, respect Pakistan in ways that are not given to other non-Arab countries. The exile of Nawaz Sharif was mediated by Saudi Arabia, as also his return to Quetta to Peshawar.

If PPP and PML (both Benazir and Sharif) have filed papers to fight the elections, decide not to participate in the elections, which both parties have threatened to boycott if the state of emergency is not lifted, then Musharraf and his Muslim League (ML), even with the help of MMA (coupled with suspension by the Commonwealth in its meeting held in Uganda) may not have international legitimacy.

The Commonwealth, however, has requested Pakistan to remain engaged with the group and support the return of democratic government and the rule of law. Commonwealth suspension may not have teeth, but certainly has symbolic political value.

In the ultimate analysis, all South Asian nations should endeavour for the establishment of electoral democracy in case liberal democracy cannot return to Pakistan due to ethnic and sectarian conflict coupled with the inherent conviction of the military that they would continue to be the guardians of the supreme interest of the Pakistan nation.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is former secretary and ambassador.

The end justifies the means



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

SAYING farewell to an institution that has served in for any length of time can be a wrenching experience, so it must have been for Pervez Musharraf. It has been 46 years since he first wore the uniform of a Gentleman Cadet (GC) of the Pakistan Military Academy (PMA). Handing over the baton to Ashfaq Kayani, he symbolically passed on part of the absolute power he has wielded absolutely for nine long years.

On being appointed COAS Pakistan Army in October 1998, Musharraf became first among equals. Since taking over the reins of the government in Oct 1999, his power had no equal, and it lasted till November 28, 2007. Kayani has now become first among equals.

His loyalty to Musharraf notwithstanding, the new COAS would do well to heed what Musharraf repeats endlessly, "Pakistan first."

Musharraf let a hundred flowers bloom in the electronic media and, till he launched his book in late 2006, he revelled in their reciprocated adulation. When Chief Justice (CJ) of the Supreme Court of Pakistan Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry (a beneficiary of the earlier Provisional Constitution Order (PCO-1)

refused to roll over and play dead in March, as was expected of him, an "ungrateful" media ditched Musharraf and joined the "ungrateful" superior judiciary (all beneficiaries of PCO-1) in open revolt against his reign, the see-saw battle culminating in the proclamation of emergency on November 3, and Musharraf's second Provisional Constitutional Order (or PCO-2).

Notwithstanding many reasons given for the emergency, the only real reason was revealed on Thursday November 29, with the swearing-in of the "civilian" president of Pakistan. All things remaining normal, Musharraf has promised to lift emergency and PCO-2 on December 16.

Mohammad Sehgal, otherwise an excellent human being, is quite unsuited to being the caretaker PM of a government meant to conduct free and fair elections. If miracles were to happen, quite unlikely in this case, and Sehgal were to oversee a truly transparent electoral process, the PML (Q) leader (and senate chairman) being a Musharraf-loyalist is a double whammy, and this perception among the public would taint the elections and render the

exercise meaningless. The first test for Kayani's loyalty to his mentor is to give Musharraf quiet counsel that it is in his interest, and that of the country's, to ensure that the general elections not only be above board and clean but must also be seen to be such.

A genuinely neutral caretaker cabinet headed by a person of distinction would go a long way in satisfying a great majority of the electorate that the yardstick of fairness and transparency has been met. This would counteract the fact that the losers would still yell to high heaven that they were victims of rigging and manipulation. Free and fair elections will give also Musharraf and the army credibility, which, presently, their collective image has in short supply, both at home and abroad.

With oil at \$ 100 per barrel, and many world financial institutions taking heavy losses, particularly in mortgage lending in real-estate, a world economic crisis is looming. If the Pakistani public take to the streets and vent their anger about spiraling prices, unemployment and likely food shortages, mob activity could well lead to anarchy. We cannot afford a political crisis to combine with an economic one.

This is not a Doomsday scenario, but the meltdown of the integrity and the sovereignty of the state will surely follow.

Political animal Ms Benazir has taken the mature route of not leaving the field open. Mian Nawaz Sharif, probably a clear winner in the coming elections, has shot himself in the foot by going with the religious parties and threatening a boycott. The MMA, particularly without the JUI (F), does not have a hope in hell of winning even half the electoral power they wielded because of the rigged 2002 elections.

Imran Khan has been consistent in his opposition and has not vacillated, standing his ground on principles is acceptable since he is not tainted with corruption.

Despite a loyal hard-core and committed following in almost every constituency, Imran would be hard put to win even a single seat. Because he has nothing to win in the elections, he has nothing to lose, his stand being both compatible and convenient.

There are many who want a definite power-sharing arrangement that ensures that the politicians do not run riot as they did during the period 1988-1999, and

the swearing-in of Pervez Musharraf as a civilian president should now be a closed chapter. I still believe that he should have fought the presidential elections without his uniform, given the legal circumstances the end justifies the means.

The "Federalist Papers" were authored in the late 1780's by the two pillars of the US Constitution, Alexander Hamilton (later the first US treasury secretary) and James Madison (later the first US vice-president) with some help from John Jay (who later became the first Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court). In Federalist paper 44 Madison wrote: "no axiom is more clearly established in law or in reason than that wherever the end is required, the means are authorised."

In Lebanon they will vote the serving army chief as president in the next few days, a pragmatic step to ward off anarchy. I wait with bated breath to hear the international reaction, or is their approbation only reserved for Pakistan?

Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry's positive judicial activism led to a situation where martial law was not declared but came into effect by the means of the emergency and PCO-2. A number of excellent judges, including him, have thus been lost to us. To quote Ron Chevron in his Biography of Alexander Hamilton: "Both Hamilton and Madison were rational men who assumed that people often acted irrationally because of ambition and avarice."

Madison said that if men were angels no government would be necessary. Both Madison and Hamilton wanted to erect barriers against irrational popular impulses

and tyrannical minorities and majorities, public opinion being distilled by skeptical, sober-minded representatives. In a big, heterogeneous country, Madison argued in Federalist paper 51, conflicting interests should neutralise one another, checking abuse of power, let ambition counteract ambition!"

The major problem facing Pakistan's democracy is the "first-past-the-post" system, allowing a tyrannical minority in each constituency to become elected representatives of the people. If anyone does not win a clear majority, a "run-off" election between the first two candidates gives the electorate a clear choice. Moreover "Proportional Representation" is a must. Imran Khan and his hard-core following of 12000-15000 in almost every constituency may end up having more votes nationally than either the MMA or the MQM, but may not win a single seat in the National or Provincial Assemblies compared to the dozens and dozens these parties get, and very correctly so.

This exercise, which is not complicated and captures the real essence of democracy, will give some say to the likes of Imran Khan and for those who vote for people like him. If the political parties boycott the election, it will be a great opportunity for Musharraf to delay the elections even beyond March 2008, and do the right thing for Pakistan by having a genuinely neutral caretaker regime supervise accountability and elections thereof.

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The red ribbon

Lack of proper knowledge on HIV/AIDS is another high risk factor. Only 17 percent of the most-at-risk groups have correct knowledge about prevention of the disease, but most people have misconceptions about it. A baseline survey of adolescents and young people (15-24 years) in 2005 found that only one out of three males in urban and one out of four in rural areas had correct knowledge on HIV/AIDS.

BILLY I. AHMED

THE Red Ribbon is the global symbol for solidarity with HIV-positive people and those living with AIDS. World AIDS Day, observed December 1 each year, is dedicated to raising awareness about the AIDS pandemic caused by the spread of HIV infection.

UNAIDS and the WHO estimate that the total number of people living with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) has reached its highest level. As of 2006, there were an estimated 40.3 million people living with HIV.

AIDS has killed more than 25 million people, making it one of the most destructive epidemics in recorded history. Despite recent

improved access to antiretroviral treatment and care in many regions of the world, the AIDS epidemic claimed an estimated 3.1 million lives in 2005, of which more than half a million were children.

The concept of World AIDS Day originated at the 1988 World Summit of Ministers of Health on Programs for AIDS Prevention. Since then, it has been taken up by governments, international organisations and charities around the world.

Two species of HIV infect humans: HIV-1 and HIV-2. HIV-1 is more virulent and more easily transmitted, and is the source of the majority of HIV infections throughout the world, while HIV-2 is less easily transmitted and is largely confined to West Africa. Both forms

of the virus are believed to have originated in West-Central Africa, and jumped species (zoonosis) from primates to humans.

HIV/AIDS infection in Bangladesh, so far, is within fair limit, but is appreciatively wide open to increase owing to prevalence of certain behavioural patterns and risk factors.

A WHO report on Bangladesh still considers it a low HIV/AIDS prevalence country. The WHO estimates there are 13,000 HIV-positive people in the country, and HIV prevalence among the adult population is less than 0.01 percent.

The swift rise of HIV/AIDS has been marked among the high-risk groups, including sex workers and injecting-drug users (IDUs). For example, in a pocket of central

Bangladesh, the HIV prevalence rate among the IDUs jumped from 1.4 percent to 8.9 percent in a three-year period.

According to the latest information available with the National AIDS/STD Program (NASP), 874 cases of HIV/AIDS were confirmed as of December 31, 2006.

According to National HIV Surveillance findings, the rate of HIV infection among the street-based sex workers in central Bangladesh is higher than that of the sex workers in other parts of South Asia. The majority of brothel-based sex workers report having sex without using condoms with some of their clients.

In central Bangladesh, 9.7 percent and in south-eastern Bangladesh 12 percent female sex workers have been found to be infected with syphilis. The high rates of syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) confirms the low rate of condom use and the presence of other risky sexual behaviours that facilitate the spread of HIV infection.

Therefore, it is imperative to give priority to education, poverty alleviation, and regular media

coverage for disseminating knowledge about HIV/AIDS, and to offer sex education to the adolescents and the young under an academic program, suggested Mohammad Shafiq